

SEGREGATION AS A MEAN TO ACHIEVE AUTONOMY

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I have adhered to the Honor Code for this assignment.

Spatial segregation has been enforced on the Jewish community for a long time. It had been called ghetto or shtetl, and it was rare for these communities to have autonomy. Especially after the Westphalia treaty, Jewish communities were not considered nation states and thus could not gain autonomy in most situations. However, Kiryas Joel, the fully Hasidic village in the state of New York, seems they gained "local sovereignty" by achieving its own autonomy (Myers 2016, 224). This is spatial segregation, but it is different from past segregation because Kiryas Joel has their own autonomy (Stern 2021, 75). The presence of Kiryas Joel raises the question of segregation. Segregation has been treated as a negative word and is often related to discrimination against minorities (Stern 2021, 67). Nevertheless, Kiryas Joel insists it brought positive results for both majority and minority groups utilizing segregation. This paper will examine the possibility of positive segregation and its effect on the autonomy of both communities as a whole and individuals in the community.

Before focusing on Kiryas Joel as the community, grasping the historical context of Satmar Hasidic Jews, who built and consisted of Kiryas Joel, and the formation of Kiryas Joel briefly would help understand this salient community. Hasidic Jews have its root in Eastern Europe, or especially in the Satmar community, northeastern Hungary was their home (Ferziger 2015, 282). After the devastation of the Holocaust by the Nazis, the Satmar community immigrated to Williamsburg, New York, even though they were not willing to (Myers 2011, 37). Joel Teitelbaum, who led Satmar Hasidic Jews, also made his way to the US in 1946 while avoiding secularizing, or in other words, Americanizing, but Joel Teitelbaum gradually Americanized whether he was aware or not (Myers 2016, 230). After certain periods, because of the high birth rates of Satmar Hasidic and Puerto Ricans who arrived in Williamsburg for cheap

housing, they needed to find a different site where they could sustain their community longer. Then Satmar community found the land near the Town of Monroe. At first, Joel Teitelbaum did not aim to establish the village based on American law. What his community needed was a place to live with expanding population (Myers 2016, 234). However, the tension between the Town of Monroe and the Satmar community rose because of the many differences that resulted from Hasidic rituals such as synagogues, ritual baths, public education, and the Monroe community's fear of expanding Satmar community, and they went to the Supreme Court (Stern 2021, 73). Thus Joel Teitelbaum decided to found their village (Myers 2016, 235).

After all the conflicts with the Town of Monroe, Kiryas Joel remains an autonomous village for today. Now the Satmar community has control over their own community, otherwise known as autonomy (Myers 2016, 224). The Satmar community no longer has conflicts with the Monroe community. Actually, one Kiryas Joel official said both communities are now "good neighbors" (Stern 2021, 78). Satmar Hasidic Jewish now practice their own ritual, which is illiberal and thus might violate US norms in their daily life (Stern 2021, 73). Kiryas Joel is the first and biggest Hasidic community in history (Myers 2016, 222). It seems the Satmar community's freedom of religion is now fully achieved, and everything is going well. However, there are problems in Kiryas Joel as their community related to education and individual autonomy. This paper will discuss those problems.

In 1994, the case of *Board of Education of Kiryas Joel Village School District v. Grumet* went to the Supreme Court because of the tension between Citizen taxpayers and the New York School Board Association and Board of Education of Kiryas Joel because public school in

Kiryas Joel adopted excessive religious practices. The court concluded that public schools in Kiryas Joel only practice their own culture (Stern 2021, 73). Thus, there is no reason to blame Kiryas Joel. However, the claim is worth paying attention to. Taxpayers invoked the First Amendment, which requires the separation of church and state. Kiryas Joel is run based on American rules, but it is a "theocracy" - the assimilation of theology and democracy. Religious leaders still have the initiative in the village, and religious law controls the public space of Kiryas Joel (Myers 2016, 240).

Additionally, the rise of the community's autonomy usually means a reduction of community members' autonomy (Stern 2021, 79). For instance, women's autonomy would be potentially violated because of Hasidic lifestyle, such as early marriages, gender roles, praying behind a mechitzah (partition separating men from women), and even mikvah (ritual bath) ceremonies (Al-Hibri 1999, 44). For the Satmar community, Kiryas Joel is the space that can practice their illiberal yet important rituals. However, for the individuals in the Satmar community, Kiryas Joel is the nearly inescapable space that violates their human rights. The question invoked here is how to balance two different fundamental human rights, freedom of religion and freedom of thought or expression. To sustain the community's autonomy, this question should be taken seriously.

Based on what has been argued, it could be stated that Kiryas Joel and its spontaneous segregation is one form of achieving autonomy, or "local sovereignty," for minority communities. The fact that long suppressed community gained autonomy itself is surprising. However, to keep their autonomy as a community, they need to take the questions into

consideration related to individual's autonomy inside their community. One way to achieve this is to seek the means to advocate community members' autonomy. There is no perfect form of social structure, but through working together, it is always possible to improve the structure to broaden the minority's autonomy as the Satmar community achieved.

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